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*Perforated Iron Tsuba in Heianjo Style Late 17th Century
Monkeys and Pine Tree*

Exhibition of Tsuba in the Japanese Cabinet.

OF all those adjuncts of a sword, through the refined ornamentation of which the Japanese samurai or knight loved to pay homage to the sacred emblem of his order, not one was so intimately associated with the blade itself as the tsuba, or guard, for without the guard a sword loses much of its efficiency. For this reason the great masters of metal work ever turned to the tsuba as a vehicle for the expression of their highest effort, while the most noted painters gloried in supplying them with designs for its embellishment.

In judging the excellence of a tsuba two main considerations are to be borne in mind: first, its practical adaptability as a part of the weapon, and, second, its intrinsic beauty as an expression of artistic endeavor. The practical requirements, governed of course by the size, shape, weight, etc., of the blade, are: appropriate shape for the protection of the hand, strength to withstand impact, and sufficient lightness to preserve the proper balance of the sword. On the artistic side we have to consider: beauty of material, including color and surface texture, beauty and appropriateness of design, and quality of execution. Among those tsuba which in the

highest degree combine the above requirements, and hence deserve to be placed in the first rank, we find perhaps more examples of Ashikaga (1338-1583) workmanship than of that of any other period. Happily in the present exhibition there are a number of excellent specimens of the work of this time.

Ashikaga tsuba are generally made of well-tempered iron more or less perforated in various designs, the metal itself being often purposely so affected by the super-imposition and hammering together of different layers varying in hardness, as to present, after treatment with acids, a surface resembling that of grained or knotted wood. Inlay with gold or other metals was sometimes sparingly used, but as a rule the artists depended for effect upon the surface texture and rich brown color of the iron itself. The earlier tsuba artists confined themselves as a rule to the more or less conventional treatment of familiar designs, but as time passed on and technical skill increased, they gradually broadened their field of subjects until it included, not only those manifestations of nature which exhibited beauty of form and movement, but episodes from heroic legend and history, and parables of



*Tsuba by Nobuiye, Miochin School Late 17th Century
Design in the Form of a Peach, with Leaves partly in Relief
and partly Brass Inlay*

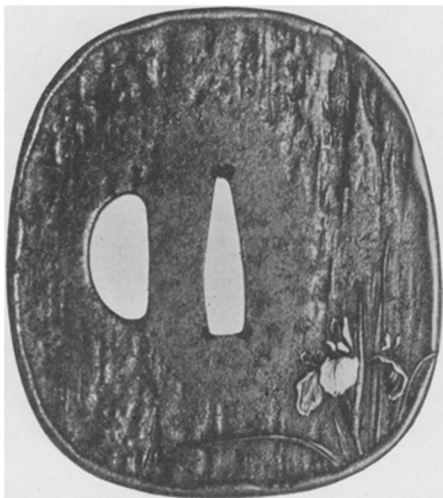


*Iron Tsuba by Kinai, Echizen Province Late 18th Century
Perforated Design, Chrysanthemum Flower and Leaf*

Buddhist law. These latter were often treated in that light and semi-humorous vein which in the Far East serves to popularize religion and ethical principle and to make them daily experiences rather than things apart from the spirit of the passing hour.

During the "long peace of Tokugawa" (1603-1868) there was developed great technical skill in the use of various alloys and processes which resulted in a treatment of the tsuba along lines of pictorial representation and color composition. The decorative possibilities afforded by this development, however, were more than offset in the case of most of the later artists by an abandonment of the practical considerations inherent in the conception of a good tsuba, while the prevailing spirit of the times was reflected in the often frivolous or else merely academic character of the subjects treated.

In the installation of the present exhibition an



*Iron Tsuba by Kano-Natsuo Late 19th Century
Iris Flower, Silver Inlay, on Surface imitating the
Grain of Wood*

attempt has been made to preserve somewhat of that spirit of refined simplicity which was one of the dominant notes in the life of the Ashikaga samurai.

On the centre of the dais running along the main wall of the room are displayed three panels belonging to a pair of six-fold screens painted by Shikibukio (early seventeenth century). On these panels are depicted various species of the eagle and hawk family, militant birds intimately associated by tradition and custom with armor and weapons. On a stand in front of the screens are three swords, of which the upper one, a court sword, is mounted in the style of the Fujiwara period (900-1150), the workmanship, however, being of the late seventeenth century. The central sword is of late Ashikaga style and workmanship, while the lower one is of pure Tokugawa style executed about the middle of the nineteenth century. This central display divides the exhibition of tsuba into two sections: on the right that of the Western or Kioto school, and on the left that of the Eastern or Yedo (Tokio) school.

The suit of armor displayed, as was the custom, upon its owner's travelling case, and the helmets shown upon the walls, date from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Attached to the suit of armor is a general's baton and a heavy war fan, while beside it rest against the wall a bow and a quiver full of arrows.

In such an exhibition as the present one, consisting of examples carefully selected from some twelve hundred specimens belonging to the Museum and to different collectors, it is possible to follow chronologically the development of the various schools and masters, a study in which much may be learned, not only of the principles of technique and design followed by the artists and artisans of Old Japan, but also of the ideals which inspired them.

F. G. C.

Asiatic Pottery.

A LOAN collection of remarkably beautiful Asiatic Pottery may be seen in Case 39 of the Pottery and Porcelain Room. Some of the bowls, jars, and plates are Persian and a number are of Koubacha ware from the Caucasus country of Daghestan. It is thought that these plates were originally wedding presents. In addition to the collection just mentioned, there may be seen two small bowls which were excavated at Old Merv in Turkestan. The Museum exhibits in the same case three plates recently bought in Paris, one of which, of Koubacha ware, is especially noteworthy for the harmony of its colors.

In the bottom of the case are plates of the variety usually called Rhodian, although it is now generally believed that they were made in the different cities of the mainland of Asia Minor.

The pottery of Western Asia often shows Chinese influence, and many of its decorative motives are derived from the Persian floral ornament familiar in textiles.